DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 242 226 HE 016 816

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TITLE Career and Lifestyle Aspirations of Bost n College Undergraduates.
INSTITUTION Boston Coll., Chestnut Hill. Affirmative Action Council.
PUB DATE Sep 82
NOTE 19p.
AVAILABLE FROM Office of Affirmative Action, McGuinn 405, Boston College, Chestnut Hill, MA 02167.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Career Choice; Family Influence; *Family Life; Females; Higher Education; Institutional Research; Males; *Occupational Aspiration; *Sex Differences; *Sex Role; Student College Relationship; *Undergraduate Students
IDENTIFIERS *Boston College MA

ABSTRACT

Lifestyle and career plans of Boston College undergraduate students were studied, along with the influences of family and religious background, the college academic environment, and the college social environment. A total of 298 male and 634 female students completed a study questionnaire in 1981. Although both men and women expected to have families and careers, there were clear differences between the sexes in the parental responsibilities they envisioned and in the specific occupations they hoped to enter. Women respondents tended to select careers traditionally defined as acceptable for women and expressed somewhat less confidence that they would be successful in their work than did the men. Students' work and lifestyle goals were shaped primarily by family and friends. While most students held positive views of the college, they credited the academic environment with little influence upon their aspirations. It was found that women tended to use career advisement services later in their academic careers than men did, and that the college did not offer an adequate range of female role models. It was concluded that although Boston College was not hindering women from working toward realistic career goals, it was not directly helping them either. Eleven recommendations are offered for the college. (SW)

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Career and Lifestyle Aspirations of Boston College Undergraduates

Sharlene Hesse-Biber
Joan McGregor Gosselin

September, 1982

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Affirmative Action Council
Boston College

Preface

This study was initiated in the winter of 1980-81 when the Boston College Affirmative Action Council and its Committee on Women's Role and Image became interested in the question of how the University is helping women students prepare for the redefined adult roles of today. Is the academic environment as facilitative for the development of women's career and lifestyle aspirations as it is for men's? In what way do women's choices and expectations differ from those of men? And what are the factors that have shaped these expectations? How do the perceptions and experiences of women on this campus compare with those of the men students? And finally, what are the implications for education? While it is clear that women at Boston College are not discouraged from developing to their full potential, the Council was curious to learn to what extent the women felt that they are actively encouraged to do so. These questions became the focus of the research the Council finally decided to commission.

With financial support from the Executive Vice President, Dr. Frank Campanella, and a great deal of interest and help from Affirmative Action Council members, both male and female, the Committee on Women's Role and Image contracted with Professor Sharlene Hesse-Biber and her sociology research group to design and conduct a comprehensive survey of men and women undergraduates at Boston College. The following report is the result. The major findings and the recommendations that conclude the report propose some directions that Boston College could take in creating the kind of environment that actively prepares both men and women for future career and lifestyle choices.

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Affirmative Action Council

September, 1982

Acknowledgements

Many in the Boston College community contributed generously to this project. Our thanks go first to the undergraduate students who shared their thoughts and opinions with us in replying to the questionnaire.

The project began in February 1981 and was completed in September 1982. Mary Lou Soczek co-authored the original research proposal and made a valuable contribution to the development of the questionnaire. Karen Shire and Ann Podesta, our research assistants, performed the tedious tasks of coding and keypunching the data and assisted with the data analysis with patience, accuracy and good humor. Sheila Packard and Dick Batten, our computer consultants, were invaluable during the data analysis phase of the project. Both helped to draft earlier versions of the report. Dick Batten is also co-author of the Appendix. In addition we wish to acknowledge the contributions of Professor Hesse-Biber's Spring 1981 class of "Women at Work," and especially the efforts of Ellen Kelly, the Work-Study student who assisted with the course.

Among the Boston College administrators and staff we are grateful to Robert Lay, Program Director of Research, Enrollment and Admissions, for providing the information and data needed for our sample selection. We also extend our thanks to Rev. J. A. Panuska, S.J., the former Academic Vice President, for providing us with data on the University faculty and staff. Brian Feeney of the Computer Center was helpful throughout the entire project and served as a statistical consultant along with Professor Alan Gordon. Special thanks also go to Patricia Russell of the Budget Department, and to the Sociology Department and the School of Nursing for their excellent secretarial and administrative aid. Finally we extend our appreciation to Sister Mary Felicita Day for sharing her office space with the researchers.

The Boston College Affirmative Action Council and its Committee on Women's Role and Image gave us the opportunity to undertake this research. In particular we would like to thank Dr. Alice Jeghelian and Professor Janet James. Dr. Frank B. Campanella, Executive Vice President of Boston College, provided financial assistance and encouragement throughout the course of the project.

And finally, special thanks go to our families for the understanding that made it possible for us to combine our work and family lives.

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Introduction

Just over a decade ago, women were a small minority at Boston College; today they are a majority of the undergraduate population. This transformation has taken place at a time when women's adult roles are being redefined. Unlike their mothers, Boston College's female undergraduates generally expect to be employed for most of their adult lives. To find out how the University has responded to the changing composition of its undergraduate student body, the Affirmative Action Council commissioned a study of the career and lifestyle aspirations of Boston College students.

Both men and women, the study found, expect to have families and careers. However, there are clear differences between the sexes in the parental responsibilities they envision and in the specific occupations they hope to enter. These work and lifestyle goals are shaped primarily by family and friends. While most students hold positive views of their College, they credit the academic environment with surprisingly little influence upon their aspirations. Moreover, men and women are not deriving the same benefits from their years here. Although Boston College is not hindering women from working towards realistic career goals, it is not directly helping them either.

This report reviews the most important findings of the research, then recommends specific steps Boston College could take toward creating a facilitating environment, one that actively supports the development of its students' career and lifestyle aspirations.

Background

Until very recently, males in the United States were more likely than females to go on to college after high school. Parents and counselors were more likely to encourage and finance the education of sons, and admission standards were more favorable for males. For the past three decades, however, the proportion of males going on to college has remained the same, while the proportion of women has been increasing. (Frazier and Sadker, 1973; Hesse-Biber and Fox, 1983—forthcoming)

The movement to coeducation has taken place less gradually at Boston College. Founded by the Jesuit Order in 1863, Boston College was an exclusively male institution for its first 60 years. The first women were admitted in the mid-twenties when the University began teacher training for Sisters of Saint Joseph of the Boston Archdiocese. However, it was not until 1936, when the Graduate School of Social Work opened, that women were admitted to any other programs. Women entered the Law School in 1941. The School of Nursing was predominantly female from its opening in 1947. The School of Education was coeducational from its opening in 1952.

Boston College became a fully coeducational university when undergraduate women were admitted to the School of Arts and Sciences in 1969 and to the School of Management in 1970. The undergraduate population is now over 56% female—about the same as the proportion of women enrolled at colleges throughout the country.

The entrance of women into higher education, at Boston College and elsewhere, is partly the result of women's changing social and economic roles. Women are marrying later and postponing childbearing. They are also joining the labor force in record numbers. At the turn of the century, only 18% of adult females were working. During World War II this figure increased to 29%, and by 1980 more than half of all women were employed outside the home. (US Department of Labor, 1980) The average married woman with children can now expect to work at least 25 years of her life—only 11 years less than the average male. (Smith, 1979) Single, divorced, widowed or separated women can expect to work the same number of years as the average male. (Mahoney, 1981: 4)

Educational attainment is a major factor in determining the range of occupations available to an individual, but there are other important influences as well. Discriminatory practices in the workplace can restrict women's job opportunities. Prior socialization is also significant. Because so many women are not taught from childhood that they are capable of a full range of occupational attainments, even well-trained women have been found to lack self-confidence and have limited career expectations. Indeed, some fear success as being "unfeminine." (Project on the Status and Education of Women, 1982: 4)

Because these attitudes and practices are such a significant barrier for women, elimination of discriminatory policies in colleges may not be sufficient to assure that women students will actually have equal opportunities. An apparently non-discriminatory institution may operate as what Freeman (1975) terms a "null environment." According to Freeman, the null environment, ". . . an academic situation that neither encourages nor discourages students of either sex is inherently discriminatory against women because it fails to take into account differentiating external environments from which women and men students come." (Freeman, 1975:198). Freeman points out that women's prior socialization into a restricting female role is a handicap that a null academic environment can reinforce. She notes, for example, that while male professors may not specifically discourage their female students, by failing to encourage them—thereby failing to counteract previous training—the professors can "discriminate against women without really trying." (Freeman, 1975: 198)

This study found no evidence of overt sex discrimination at Boston College. However, it is also clear from this investigation that the University is not taking all the affirmative steps it might in helping students—men as well as women—to make the most of their abilities and to achieve the goals they have set for themselves.

Description of the Study

Aspirations are shaped by many forces. This study focussed on three: family and religious background, the academic environment of Boston College, and peer relationships. The examination of the second used the College Environment Impact Model developed by Astin (1970a, b), which is the dominant model for studying how a university affects its students.

To explore the nature and origins of students' goals, a lengthy questionnaire was administered to a representative sample of undergraduates in 1981. The questionnaire explored respondents' social and familial backgrounds, experiences with both academic and social life at Boston College, plans for careers and families, and the ways in which their aspirations had been shaped. The surveys were filled out by 298 men and 634 women, with roughly equal numbers from each class year.

Lifestyle and Career Plans

Male and female Boston College undergraduates share common lifestyle and occupational aspirations. Most expect to have a career, as well as marriage and children. However, there are important dissimilarities and discrepancies between the goals of male and female students. Women's career aspirations are lower than the men's and their priorities are different in choosing an occupation.

Plans for Marriage and Children

Male and female respondents both indicated a strong desire to marry and have children. Eighty-eight percent of the males and 92% of the females said that they would prefer to be married than to be single. Indeed, even among those who rejected marriage *per se*, about half claimed a preference for living with someone in a monogamous relationship, rather than being single and independent.

Children were very much in the picture as well. Respondents of both sexes desired children; the most popular number of offspring was 2. Only 11% of the women and 15% of the men said that they preferred to remain childfree.

Career Aspirations

Although virtually all of the women respondents expect to work, they have not strayed far from traditional female roles. Many anticipate entering lines of work—such as teaching or nursing—that have long been considered appropriate for women. In part because of these choices, the women aspire to less occupational success and prestige than do their male counterparts, and they are less likely—realistically so—to expect to be highly paid for their work. Women are also far more likely than the men to expect to work part-time.

Of importance as well is the fact that women set different priorities than the men do in choosing an occupation. Opportunities for career advancement and high salary were less important to women than to men.

Table 1
Some Differences Between Male and Female Career Expectations and Values

	Males	Females
Expectations		
to work full-time	96%	52%
to work part-time	3%	43%
to be very successful	57%	54%
to be highly paid	63%	54%
Valued Job Characteristics		
good pay	35%	27%
possibility of rapid advancement	25%	19%
prestige	23%	21%
opportunity to serve others	39%	50%
flexibility—can accommodate the demands of childrearing	25%	49%

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Table 2
Preferred Employment Patterns for Women with Children of Different Ages: Male and Female Opinions

Work Pattern Preferred for Mothers	Ages of Children: Infants M	Infants F	Ages 2-5 M	Ages 2-5 F	Ages 6-12 M	Ages 6-12 F	Ages 13-18 M	Ages 13-18 F
not work	90%	82%	66%	51%	22%	10%	4%	1%
work part-time	9%	16%	31%	42%	61%	58%	40%	28%
work full-time	1%	2%	3%	8%	17%	32%	56%	71%

Rather, women were seeking jobs flexible enough to combine with childrearing. In addition, they placed a higher value than did the men on the opportunity to provide social benefits to others. Table 1 summarizes some of the differences between male and female career goals.

Women's aspirations were limited by both internal and external barriers. Some women expressed doubts about their own abilities. For example, "I'm not sure I'll have the motivation to achieve all of what I am able." (Respondent #0186). One woman saw a connection between her insecurity and her choice of education as a major: "I came to BC as an elementary education major. I was not sure of myself and did not want to try to do something I was not able to achieve." (Respondent #0294)

Women were also cognizant of external barriers they might face in advancing non-traditional careers. A woman who expected to enter the field of computer science expressed concern that her sex would be an obstacle to success: "I'd like to get into some kind of support work. In other words, a sales team would sell the computer and I'd show the company how to implement the system. A problem that I foresee is that since I am a woman, clients will question my intelligence and knowledge of the subject matter." (Respondent #0216)

Expectations For Combining Family and Work Roles

Males and females agreed that having children required some reduction in a woman's work effort outside the home. Most believed that a woman with an infant or preschooler should not be employed, that the mother of school-age children should work part-time only, and that full-time employment was appropriate only for mothers whose offspring were of high school age. Despite this general agreement, however, women consistently favored more employment for mothers than did the men, as Table 2 shows.

Male and female expectations also differed in the economic area of family life. Women were far more likely than the men to expect that they would share breadwinning responsibilities with a spouse. Nearly three-quarters of the women, but only about a third of the men, expected that both male and female marriage partners would make a significant economic contribution to the household.

The women, as indicated earlier, plan to modify their careers to accommodate family obligations: many expect to work part-time and they seek jobs with sufficient flexibility to make career-family combinations workable. Men, on the other hand, did not expect to adjust their careers to family needs.

A number of women discussed the problems in combining work and family. One respondent wrote: "As is common with most friends planning occupations, I worry about raising a family. If I do have children, I want to bring them up to the best of both my and my husband's capabilities. However, I want to give my all to my career too. I hope I will find a spouse so that we can equally share in all aspects of raising a family without jeopardizing our careers." (Respondent #0093). But many women appeared to feel that careers would have to yield to family obligations. This comment was typical: "I may have to forgo either educational or occupational goals to raise a family, but I realize that I want to have a family and take on these responsibilities." (Respondent #0358).

Influence of Family and Religious Background

Students' lifestyle and career aspirations reflect, in large part, the social environment in which they were raised. When respondents were asked who had influenced them most in making their career decisions, more than half named a parent. This section first looks at the respondents' social backgrounds, then examines how these backgounds affected their aspirations.

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Social Background of Respondents

The college population at Boston College is relatively homogeneous. One respondent, who was complaining about the lack of cultural diversity at the University, offered this summary: "Four words can describe this community: white, rich, Catholic and Irish. Emphasize that order." There is some truth to his generalizations.

In the sample, as in the Boston College population, the great majority—95%—are white; 85% are Catholics. While those of Irish descent are not in the majority, this is by far the largest single ethnic group. Finally, if students' estimates can be believed, more than 60% of the families have annual incomes above $30,000, and over a quarter top $50,000 per year.

Nature of Parental Influence and Support

A large majority of the respondents said that their parents had influenced their career decisions. In fact, when they were asked to identify the one person who had most affected their career choice, a parent was the individual most frequently named. Respondents were more likely to credit the parent of the same sex as being most influential. However, the parent of the opposite sex was the second most likely to be named, ahead of professors, peers and others.

Though both fathers and mothers were influential, they exerted their influence in different ways. In general, fathers gave more active aid, while mothers offered emotional support and recognition. This description of a father is typical: "My father has challenged me through various activities and has participated in them along with me. He has looked for things that will help me in the future and has supported me in any independent decision that I make." (Male respondent #0270)

Some women also received such support from their fathers. "My father made sure I worked during high school. He gave me an incentive, encouraged me, gave me advice, stuck with me, and most important, gave me a push to start and hounds me to continue it." (Respondent #0222)

Influential mothers generally were described in very different terms: "My mother encouraged me and supported my decision. However, she would have done so no matter what my choice would have been." (Female respondent #0154)

One recipient of such uncritical support from her mother named her father as most influential: "My father has encouraged me more than my mother. My mother is just happy with any decision I make." (Female respondent #0235)

Impact of Maternal Employment on Aspirations

Nearly all the fathers—96%—had been employed during the respondents' high school years. However, only 30% of the mothers had worked full-time during this period, and just 15% of the mothers worked full-time earlier in the respondents' lives. Working mothers were particularly important role models for their daughters; in addition, they affected their sons' views of women's careers.

The overwhelming majority—95%—of the male students intended to enter full-time employment. Women's plans varied: 52% of the female respondents planned full-time employment; 43% wanted to work part-time; 6% preferred to be unemployed. Daughters of mothers who worked full-time, however, were far more likely to plan full-time employment than were daughters of mothers who worked part-time or not at all. This relationship was particularly strong for women whose mothers worked before their daughters were in high school.

Daughters of employed mothers were more likely to expect to continue their education past college, they planned somewhat more prestigious careers, and they were also more likely to expect success than female respondents whose mothers had not worked.

Employed mothers strongly affected both sons' and daughters' views about combining career and family roles. Respondents whose mothers had been employed were more accepting of working mothers than were respondents who lacked this direct experience. For example, of males whose mothers had been employed, 83% believed that the mother of school-age children could work; in agreement were just 61% of males whose mothers had not worked. Although more women approved of jobs for mothers of school-age children, here too maternal employment had some impact: 91% of daughters of working mothers, but 88% of daughters of non-working mothers approved.

Religion and Attitudes Toward Employment of Mothers

Roman Catholicism clearly defines sex role standards for men and women: a married Catholic woman's primary responsibility is to be the help-mate of her husband and caretaker of her children. The views of the Church do not strongly support married women who work outside the home, especially if they have children. It is not surprising, therefore, that a strongly religious Catholic background was clearly associated with the belief that women with children should curtail their labor force participation. Forty-five percent of religious Catholic women, but 70% of non-Catholic or non-religious Catholic women, plan full-time work.

Impact of the College Academic Environment

In general, the respondents thought well of Boston College and of their own performance at the University. They had favorable views of their professors and their classes. Although certain less satisfactory areas of university life could be identified, only 8% of those surveyed had ever seriously thought about transferring

Table 3
Respondents' Majors

	Males	Females
Biological and physical sciences	17%	8%
Humanities and social sciences	29%	31%
Business	32%	20%
Education	1%	10%
Nursing	1%	14%
Other and undeclared	21%	17%

to another school. But despite their positive attitudes, the academic environment appeared to have little influence upon their career decisions. In addition, there were some important differences between the perceptions and experiences of men and women.

Academic Performance

Males and females had identical mean grade point averages: 3.1, or just over B. However, they did not choose the same major fields, nor did they function in the same way academically.

Major Fields. The respondents' majors, which are shown in Table 3, reflect traditional sex roles to some extent, with women concentrated in the social sciences, humanities, education and nursing. To the extent that sex typing has broken down, it is women who have entered the male preserve. Men still rarely major in education or nursing.

Behavior in Class. Women seemed to enjoy their classes more than men; they claimed better study habits and greater involvement in the subject matter. But despite these apparent advantages, the women consistently described themselves as more reluctant than the men to participate in class discussion; they were more fearful of being wrong in class, and more unwilling to question their teachers—all findings that are consistent with research done at other schools.

There are social reasons for this fear of verbal risk-taking. In primary school women are trained to remain quiet as part of "good" behavior. Later, as one observer wrote, "Bright girls are confronted with a dilemma: to speak up and perhaps be labeled smart, hence unfeminine, or to remain silent and maintain the secret of their intellectual ability." (Speizer, 1981: 402)

Women pay a high price for their fear. Verbal risk-taking has been found to be an important ingredient in preparing for a career. Also, research has shown that students who speak out in class can gain the attention and interest of their professors. (Angrist and Almquist, 1975: 200)

In addition to being less willing to participate in class discussion, the women surveyed did less voluntary academic work—independent study, informal discussions, etc.—than did the men. Non-involvement in these activities should be regarded as a problem for students of either sex: this study found that participation in voluntary academic activities was associated with intellectual growth and other significant benefits.

Table 4
Reported Academic Growth of Males and Females

	Percent reporting growth in each area	
	Males	Females
Organize and present ideas	90%	90%
Question ideas of others	88%	90%
Question own ideas	85%	92%
Write well	81%	78%
Formulate original ideas	80%	80%
Speak effectively	80%	76%
Pursue a task to completion	77%	81%
Understand complex issues	78%	72%
Work in comfort with scholars	71%	73%
Utilize basic math skills	63%	44%
Utilize quantitative skills (e.g. statistics, computers)	56%	43%

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Academic Growth. Students were asked if Boston College had made a contribution to their growth in a number of academic areas. In virtually all of these, at least 70% of the respondents credited the college with a positive effect, as shown in Table 4.

Mathematical and quantitative skills were a distressing exception. Only 63% of the males and just 44% of the females report that college has improved their ability to use basic mathematical skills. Even smaller percentages say that college has helped them use quantitative skills.

Preparation in mathematics is crucial for entrance into many high paying, high prestige careers. The lack of such preparation is a serious handicap for students of either sex. Women, however, are more likely than men to be deficient in mathematical training when they enter college. In a study of freshmen at the University of California at Berkeley, 57% of the males had four or more years of high school mathematics, while only 8% of the women came to college with this training. Their inadequate mathematics preparation made 92% of all freshmen women ineligible for three-quarters of the major fields of study at Berkeley. (Sells, 1974). Mathematics, then, acts as a critical filter, which can maintain the *status quo* by channeling women away from occupations traditionally dominated by men.

This research found that students who reported gains in quantitative skills also described increased confidence in making career decisions and in being prepared for graduate and professional school. Such students also were more likely to expect to be successful in their careers. Although reported growth is not necessarily identical to actual changes in skills and achievement, these findings are suggestive.

Attitudes Toward Professors

For the most part, the students refrained from saying that the majority of their professors possessed either very positive or very negative characteristics. The positive attributes assigned to nearly a quarter of the professors pertained to their scholarship and general encouragement of students.

Critical generalizations were rare. Unreasonably demanding professors, professors uninterested in teaching or in their students—all were said to be a small minority of the faculty. More serious transgressions—such as humiliating the respondent in class or being sexist or racist—were described as quite unusual. Most students said that none of their professors had done such things.

But despite this, relatively few professors were seen as being of more direct individual assistance to students. Most respondents estimated that no more than 10% of their teachers were particularly inspiring or had taken a personal interest in their work. One student wrote: "I wish I could learn to get to know my teachers better." (Respondent #0121) Although the students seem to believe that faculty members were approachable in theory, they apparently feel awkward about seeking them out. Professors do not appear to be taking the initiative either.

Perceived Influence of Faculty Upon Career Decisions

The faculty did not appear to have a strong influence upon respondents' career decisions. A substantial minority of respondents had not asked any professors for their advice and felt that faculty members had not influenced their career decisions at all. In general, both male and female respondents saw female professors as less influential than male professors, although the discrepancy was smaller for women than for men. (However, this finding was largely explained by the scarcity of women faculty members, as will be discussed below.)

There were striking exceptions. Wrote one respondent about a professor: "He introduced me to a whole new career decision, sparked my interest, took the time to advise me academically and career-wise, shared personal opinions, taught me everything he could in his

Table 5
Faculty Influences on Respondents' Career Plans

	Males	Females
One person who influenced career decision most was:		
Male professor	7%	5%
Female professor	2%	4%
Have not asked any professors for advice about careers and/or graduate or professional school	32%	38%
Male professors had no effect on career decision	2?%	30%
Female professors had no effect on career decision	47%	37%

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field" (Respondent #0377). Unfortunately, few students experienced such assistance from a professor.

Table 5 shows a variety of measures of faculty influence.

Female Faculty Members as Role Models

Since women constitute a small proportion of faculty, female role models are in short supply at Boston College. Their absence is particularly important since so few of the female students' mothers worked. As one researcher has noted: "When teachers are female, they can do more than merely praise a student for her academic achievement. As women, wives and mothers, they can demonstrate how a professional career articulates with the woman's entire constellation of roles." (Angrist and Almquist, 1975. 209-210)

The relatively low influence ascribed to female faculty members is another consequence of their scarcity, as well as of their concentration in the lower ranks without tenure. Indeed, some research suggests that low numbers of female faculty can serve as a negative statement: female students may "observe the rarity of the phenomenon and infer the conditions which keep it so." (Gold, 1968, as cited in Almquist and Angrist, 1971:275-276).

Career Planning

The college years are a critical time for career planning. Because of all the factors mentioned earlier, women probably are more in need of assistance in this regard than are men, especially if their options are to be widened beyond the narrow confines of traditionally female occupations. But in spite of this, the female respondents made use of university career planning services later in their academic careers than the men. Respondents of both sexes generally did not seek career assistance until their junior or senior years, and they tended to rate this service as less valuable than other school facilities. In contrast, the few students who experienced internships or assistantships appeared to gain substantial benefit from them.

Respondents were asked to indicate what was missing at Boston College that might have been helpful in planning their career and further education. Table 6 shows the answers they gave. Interestingly, women were more critical than the men; in every other area about which they were questioned, female respondents had more positive attitudes about Boston College than did the males.

More interest from professors was the most frequently named improvement, with better academic advising a close second. One woman requested both with this suggestion: "Assign new students to a staff person for academic advising and career advising. In this manner, when a student needs references and recommendations, at least one professor knows the student well enough to write one. I know no professor well enough to request a recommendation, because I was never provided with an academic advisor" (Respondent #0353).

Effect of the College Social Environment

Peer relationships are of greater importance during late adolescence than during any other stage of growth and development. In a college environment, students have less contact with adults than experienced previously. At the same time, they are at an age when it is important to separate from parents and establish their own identities.

According to Coelho *et al.* (1963), college students use friends to test ideas and behavior, stimulate intellectual growth, pool information and coping strategies, and provide support in time of crisis. Given all these functions, it is not surprising the present study found that students perceive their friends as more influential than faculty in making their career decisions.

Social and Emotional Growth

Students described the University as contributing significantly to their growth in social and emotional areas. Differences between men and women were

Table 6
What Respondents Thought was Missing at Boston College That Might Have Been Helpful in Making Career Plans

	Males	Females
More interest in career planning from professors	53%	61%
Better academic advising	52%	61%
Greater contact with alumni/ae in various career areas	44%	48%
More internships or other part-time work opportunities	41%	52%
More career information in convenient locations, such as dorms	32%	40%

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Table 7
Reported Social and Emotional Growth of Males and Females

	Percent reporting growth in each area	
	Males	Females
Interrelate with women	86%	83%
Interrelate with men	80%	83%
Work in cooperation with others	83%	89%
Appreciate ethnic diversity	72%	72%
Demonstrate leadership	62%	62%
Deal with sexism	62%	64%

small, as shown in Table 7. The exception to this pattern was the larger percentage of women who reported more growth in "learning to cooperate with others."

Social Activities

Students reported that they engaged in a wide variety of social activities with friends. As Table 8 shows, most activities were reported by equal proportions of males and females.

Peers and Academic Life

As indicated in Table 8, virtually all the respondents discussed academic issues with their peers. Nevertheless, about 10% of the respondents indicated that peer relationships had an adverse effect upon their grades. "The noisy atmosphere in the dorm and friends hanging around distract from concentration," one respondent complained (Respondent #0091). Another student wrote, "There are too many interesting things to do besides study." (Respondent #0444)

Despite the risk that interactions with friends could distract them from academic goals, both men and women felt that discussions with their peers had contributed more to their academic growth than had talks with the faculty. One obvious reason is that there had

Table 8
Social Activities of Males and Females

	Percentage of each sex reporting each activity	
	Males	Females
Go to movies, plays, concerts	98%	99%
Go to dinner or lunch	98%	99%
Discuss academic or intellectual issues	98%	99%
Discuss emotional or personal problems	94%	100%
Discuss political or social issues	97%	96%
Dance	90%	94%
Play sports	96%	89%
Watch TV	85%	88%
Watch sports	88%	84%
Study	71%	84%
Get high (drugs or alcohol)	81%	77%

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been greater opportunities for frequent discussions with peers; however judgments about the utility of discussions were made only by those who had experienced them.

Peer Influence on Career Decisions

Students found their peers more influential than professors in making career decisions. Indeed, peers were second only to parents. Table 9 compares peer and faculty influence on career decisions.

Student comments suggest that friends are valued sources of emotional support, as well as advice. For example: "A male friend has been very helpful by explaining options, discussing points of view and referring me to more informed advisors." (Respondent #0088) "My female friend helped. I had been planning a business career, basically in retail. We were talking about some research I was doing and she just stopped and said, 'Why are you wasting your time with business when you're good at research, speaking and writing. Why don't you go into law?'" (Respondent #0184)

Discussion

This research discovered little to indicate that the Boston College environment is hostile to non-traditional career and family roles for its women students. Rather, the University acts as a "null environment," neither restricting women nor providing them with the affirmative aid to formulate and realize career goals. As discussed in the introductory section of the report, a null environment can have discriminatory consequences, even in the absence of discriminatory intent.

The structure of societal institutions, as well as social values about women's work, lag behind the social fact of their ever-increasing labor force participation. Despite a high rate of employment, women are still getting the clear message that a career has a much lower priority than family commitments. In selecting their careers, women in this study stayed close to those traditionally defined as acceptable for women. They also expressed somewhat less confidence than the men that they will be successful in their work—a reflection of their fear that the job market will not accommodate the childrearing responsibilities they expect to have, and that their husbands will have little inclination to share the domestic burden. In lowering their sights the female respondents are making anticipatory adjustments to the subordinate economic roles their husbands and society will expect them to have.

The men's plans for the future reflect parental models. But women's aspirations represent a break with the past, even though their goals are modified to accommodate traditional female responsibilities. Not only do they lack models to guide them, but they may also face disapproval from their parents and their church when they pursue their aspirations.

The career advisement offered by the University is not adequate to counter the force of tradition. Women tend to use these services later in their academic careers than men do, and they also feel more in need of additional career advising. In addition, the University does not offer an adequate range of female role models. Only in the traditionally female areas of nursing and education are there significant numbers of women faculty members. Men, too, can benefit from exposure to non-traditional female role models, since their views of sex roles tend to be far more tradition-bound than those held by the women.

Female respondents appear to be as successful as the men in receiving what is explicitly offered in the classroom. But women participate less in voluntary academic activities and report less growth than the men do in mathematical and quantitative skills. Thus they are missing opportunities to develop career-related competencies.

Faculty members were viewed favorably by the respondents in this research. Yet the faculty were seen as remote—undesirably so—by most students. Professors had less influence on students' career decisions than did their families and friends. Indeed, this study suggests that career goals are formed more in the dorms and cafeterias of the University than in its classrooms and offices. Although peer relationships apparently reinforce academic values to some extent, many respondents also note that friendships involve getting high, and some students report that peer relations are a distraction from college course work.

Table 9
Comparison of Peer and Faculty Influence on Career Plans

Source of Influence	Percent who were influenced: Males	Females
Male peers	85%	86%
Female peers	81%	91%
Male faculty	72%	70%
Female faculty	53%	63%

Policy Implications and Recommendations

The underlying assumption of the recommendations that follow is that Boston College should actively support the developing career and lifestyle goals of its male

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and female undergraduates. Although respondents of both sexes want more advice and guidance from the University, women have additional needs that are not being addressed by student services. Implementation of the policy recommendations listed below would be an important first step toward a more facilitating university environment, in which male and female undergraduates would be encouraged to pursue a wide range of career goals.

Recommendation 1: Encourage faculty members to take more initiatives in getting to know students.

Respondents of both sexes indicated a strong desire for more personal attention and clearer advisement from faculty members. The faculty should become aware that their aloofness limits their ability to be helpful.

Recommendation 2: Encourage students to initiate contact with their professors, and to take advantage of internship, honors work, independent studies, and other opportunities for individual academic growth.

It is especially important for women to understand the costs of remaining silent in the classroom and to be supported in their efforts to break that silence.

Recommendation 3: Organize a study group of faculty, administrators, and students to consider present systems of advisement by professors, deans, the Career Center, the Counseling Services, and the Chaplains' Office and recommend ways of better facilitating career aspirations.

1) What kinds of career guidance do students presently secure?
2) Why do so few students seek advice early in their academic careers?
3) Is counseling available on choosing a career as well as advice on specific job-pursuing strategies?
4) Should there be special career counseling services for women?

Recommendation 4: Set up workshops to discuss curriculum, personal growth, and career development in the College of Arts and Sciences.

1) To what degree should a liberal arts curriculum foster career development for undergraduates?
2) What can the academic departments do to broaden students' rather narrow perceptions of the roles appropriate for men and women?
3) Should core requirements reflect these concerns?
4) Should career awareness be fostered in courses generally? In one particular course? As part of a major requirement? At the discretion of the faculty?

Recommendation 5: Set up workshops to address noncurricular aspects of the college environment:

1) How do extracurricular activities affect the career interests and choices of male and female undergraduates?
2) Do extracurricular activities reflect sex role biases?
3) Should colleges encourage extracurricular activities to facilitate women students' career development?
4) How can (or should) undergraduates be encouraged to participate in extracurricular activities that might promote their personal growth and career awareness?

Recommendation 6: Encourage male and female students to take sufficient mathematical training so that deficiencies in this area do not limit their career options.

Boston College must make its students aware of the adverse effects of avoiding mathematics. Interventions that have been used at other universities include workshops, clinics, and short courses designed both to teach the subject matter and to deal with the anxieties it creates. (Tobias, 1981: 17).

Recommendation 7: Study the feasibility of expanding internship opportunities for undergraduates.

Prior research indicates that work experience promotes students' career development by allowing them to master relevant skills, develop positive self-images as workers, and build opportunity networks. The study should address these issues: How effective is the Boston College Internship Program in encouraging undergraduates to consider a broad range of career options? Which students have been most influenced by an internship experience — those who had already made a career choice or those who had not thought about it?

Recommendation 8: Set up lifestyle workshops to help students explore their options, as well as the role conflicts these options might entail.

The stated goals of the female respondents represent a break from their familial and religious upbringing. In addition, these goals are not fully compatible with the exceptions the male respondents voice concerning their future spouses. Male and female students need assistance in recognizing the gaps between their views and those of important reference groups. Informal discussions with men and women from different backgrounds who have had a variety of experiences in combining work and family life would be helpful.

Recommendation 9: Increase the hiring of female faculty.

Our findings point to the need for positive role models for female undergraduates. Because women constitute a far smaller percentage of the faculty than of the student body, such models are in short supply. The situation is compounded by the concentration of female faculty in the lower ranks. It is interesting to note that in a needs assessment survey, 60% of the Boston College undergraduate women questioned emphasized the lack of professional role models as a deficiency at the school. (B.C. Needs Assessment Report on Undergraduate Women, 1981)

These steps might be taken to increase the probability of women being hired in faculty positions (see also, Gappa and Uehling, 1979):

1) Appoint more women to screening and hiring committees.

2) Expand the traditional networks used to recruit female faculty.
3) Encourage the hiring of two-career couples.

Recommendation 10: Set up a study group to assess needs and determine how the University can support the career-family role combinations of its faculty and staff members. Some measures that might be undertaken include:
1) Part-time tenurable appointments that have promotion opportunities.
2) Part-time positions with salaries and responsibilities comparable to full-time appointments.
3) Maternity and paternity leaves.
4) Appointments that allow faculty to move from full-time to part-time and back again.
5) Delay of tenure decisions without penalty for women whose careers are interrupted by pregnancy.

Recommendation 11: Upgrade the content of women's programs.

It is important to foster *explicit* messages about women students' academic and career development. This goal would be furthered by providing opportunities for women to share experiences with each other, to build networks that can provide supportive environments, and generally to counteract limiting sex role socialization. This is especially important until sufficient numbers of women are appointed in academic departments and administrative positions to serve as the necessary role models.

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